

**Full Length Research**

# **Information-Seeking Behaviour of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES) Owners: Implications for Library and Information Services**

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Accepted 13 April 2026

The study examined Information-Seeking Behaviour of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES) Owners: Implications for Library and Information Services. The study pointed out that in a small and Medium Enterprises, such as micro businesses, seeking information is crucial since the function is handled totally by one or few persons. In the small and medium business context, the importance of information seeking behaviour arises from the realization that small and medium enterprises owners' current level of knowledge is insufficient to deal with many business problems and issues. Some of information needed by small and medium enterprises owners are location of the business premises, capital and loan information, production information, policy information, legal information, consumer information, and training information. The study also highlighted the effective use of information can produce number of benefits for the small and medium businesses including reduced administrative costs, more effective collaboration with external parties and increased customer service. There is need to integrate small business owners into information society through access to library services. Every business needs to acquire, store and use information to allow it to survive. Library and Information services is very vital to the survival of small and medium businesses and it should be adequately provided for, and this is the ultimate responsibilities of the librarians. The study concluded that to remain relevant in the small and business owners, need information, and that information is stored in the library. The study therefore recommended that Government should provide adequate information infrastructure such as functional public libraries, mobile library service, and library and information centres for small and medium business owners to easily access information needs.

**Key words:** information, seeking behaviour, small business, medium, owners, library service

**Cite This Article As: Jimoh, LF., Ngerem, FC (2026). Information-Seeking Behaviour of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMES) Owners: Implications for Library and Information Services. Inter. J. Acad. Lib. Info. Sci. 14(3): 111-117**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information is a raw-material for development. The success, growth and development of any nation lies in the ability of that particular nation to obtain, assimilate and disseminate information. Strong change trends have been shaping the global business landscape over the last few decades. As a consequence, the business landscape today is characterised by uncertainty, multiple international competitors, fast-changing technology, rampant price wars and yet more reorganisation all adding to the challenges businesses face. In other words, territory is changeable, business environment

is unpredictable. Information seeking is a necessary and important stage of the strategic decision making and is essential to determine industry trends and to reveal potential threats and opportunities. It has been related to effective decision making, and firm performance (Joshi & Anand, 2018). Information needs' may often be complicated by the confusion over the definition of the concept 'information'. The concept "information" can be defined in several ways depending on the perspective from which it is being looked at. Information is an instrumental value by which people achieve some values that will contribute to basic elements of a system. Information is associated with human situations via a communication medium. In the business environment, information can be defined as a structured, meaningful statement on reality that will serve a purpose. In this study of the information needs of small business owner, it is vital to understand the nature of business information and the purpose of business information in an enterprise as a basis for making decisions that will lead to effective involvement in industrialization (Nagarkar, 2011). Information seeking is the recognition of some need perceived by the user. The behaviour may take several forms, such as demanding information from a formal or informal system like a library or from other people. Information seeking is also described as the paths pursued by individuals in the attempt to resolve a need. Information seeking as an important part of being human and that it is something that we do on a regular basis. What is common to all the three definitions is the fact that information seeking refers to actions people takes to obtain needed information. In small business sector information seeking is consider as the actions that business owners pursue in order to obtain business information to tackle a number of business challenges (Obiamalu, 2018). Through the use of information, small business owner are able to reactively and pro-actively adapt their small business to environmental changes in order to survive and prosper. There is link between information and simply would not function smoothly and this would lead to corporate decline and failure.

Library and Information services are tremendously needed by small business and Medium Enterprises owners. Library and Information services will create new opportunities for improving productivity. An effective and efficient library and information services small business owners require investment in human, physical, financial, and technological infrastructure. Information resources do not stand alone, out of context with other resources. It can be influential to a greater extent in developing culture which will serve as an agent of social, economic, political and educational development of any society. Library and information services foster national development and provision of information relevant to their daily activities small and medium enterprises owners (Oni, et al., 2014). Nigeria is a developing country where some of the small and medium business owners are either non-literate or semi-literate. There is need to involve them in national development process through the identification of their information needs and the provision of library services to improve their level of literacy and also to enhance their ability to use practical information relevant to small business.

## **INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES OWNERS**

The concept of information seeking behaviour has originated from the concept of information need, which is an understanding of one's own knowledge that is insufficient to meet a specific goal. When an individual recognizes that her or his knowledge is inadequate to deal with or to solve a problem, the information seeking behaviour is taking place. Thus, information seeking behaviour is an outcome of a need to satisfy some objectives, and it refers to the processes of determining a user's information needs, searching behaviour and subsequent interpretation and the use of information. In the Small Business context, information seeking behaviour can be understood as the process of understanding of how small business owners seek for and use business information, what sources they use to obtain information, how they deal with the challenges of unlimited amount of unstructured information and its exponential growth and identifying the factors that inhibit or encourage the use of information (Roetzel et al., 2019). The role of information and information seeking behaviour as a central element of small and medium business owners' behaviour. In the small and medium business context, the importance of information seeking behaviour arises from the realization that small and medium business owners' current level of knowledge is insufficient to deal with many business problems and issues. Small Business Owners use a variety of information-seeking methods, mostly informal (for example, oral means to seek information and contacting people who they know) to obtain information. However, the authors also note that there are various gaps in their literacies that hinder them from properly dealing with the information challenges they confront at work (Chen et al., 2016).

The Information needs of small and midum business owners arise when the amount of know-how possessed by the sole proprietor is inadequate to cope with problems emanating from various business situations. In a small business entity such as micro business, seeking information is crucial since the function is handled totally by one person. Hence, small business owners must search for information on their own since information plays a vital role in ensuring survival and success in business and is considered one of the essential ingredients for a successful entrepreneurship. Many small business owners think that there is no need for information or they might just pick information from any source to start their business; the important thing here is that people need information to be successful small business (Obiamalu, 2018).

## **Types of information that is needed by small and medium Enterprise owners**

SMSES owners need to be reminded at all times about the basic information needs regarding their enterprise so that they can be up to date in their business for effective industrialization. According to Obiamalu, (2018), the following are the types of information that is needed by small business owners:

### **Location of Business Premises Information:**

The small business owners, first step in setting up his business is to consider the location where the business will be located. This is informed by the type of business that is intended to be carried out. When considering the location, there are certain things the small business owners will bear in mind such as access to raw materials that will be used in the course of production, access road and power supply. All these have to be taken care of before sourcing for funds to finance the business.

### **Capital and Loan Information:**

SMSES owners need information on how to raise money for his business, whether small or large. Most of the time, this issue of capital is overlooked by the small business owners and it causes a lot of setbacks for the business. This aspect is usually referred to as the back-office aspect of the enterprise; this financial information plays a vital role in decision-making. Decisions must be based on good information available. It is only when there is good information on financial situations that the small business owners will be able to know the exact amount of capital that will be invested in the business and that will help him also in sourcing the money to start-up the venture.

It is not strange that money is required for the purchase of the machineries and equipment, payment of rent, hiring the resource persons, and paying for other exigencies. There are various means through which SMSES owners can source money for his business. These include personal savings, grants from government, grants from non-governmental organizations, international funding agencies, borrowing, either from friends or banks.

### **Technical Information:**

For SMSES to be successful, there is a need to carefully source for and adopt intelligent technical approach. In managing a business, planning can never stop as it is very necessary for small business owners, at the early stage of the business, to put in place a preliminary business plan. There are various types of technical information that will be vital as part of business operations such as the aesthetic design of the business environment, how to design the product, packaging of the products, the type of services he may wish to be engaged in, tools and equipment, and raw materials for the production, and it can also include means of production either more or less mechanized, more or less manual.

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT):**

Information and communication technology is a very vital means of information for the SMSES development as it is certain that ICT has made the whole world a global village. With the help of ICT, the small business owners can go online to source and access information on any product or service. There are so many business databases online that an entrepreneur can lay hands on for any type of information that is required. SMSES owners use new technologies to produce new products and services, hence they should take cognisance of the fact that cell phones and the internet increase the rate of exchange of information which may have an effect on their business operations (Nagarkar, 2010).

### **Legal Information:**

Business is a means of economic development of any nation. This business operation could be a small business, medium or large-scale enterprise which could be national or international in scope. Irrespective of the level at which the SMSES owners operate their business, they must know the legal aspects to their operations. For instance, if one wants to establish a private company here in Nigeria, the minimum number of people is two and the maximum is fifty and it must be registered under Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The SMSES need to know how the copyright law as well as trade mark and patent law works.

According to Okeke (2011), the copyright law deals with the exclusive right given to inventors for a definite period of years as a means to protect their interest and to encourage them to invent more things valuable and useful to the society. As the Business and Industry Advisory Committee to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated in 2003, the government should put in place policies that will foster SMSES owners as they are essential to job creation and economic growth. Government officials can provide incentives that encourage entrepreneurs to risk attempting new ventures. Among these are laws to enforce property rights and to encourage a competitive market system. The culture of a community also may influence how much SMSES owners strive within that community.

### **Marketing Information:**

SMSES owners to come up with innovative and creative ideas that will serve as the starting point for the new venture. Sometimes, a small business owner sees a market need and initiates an idea for a product or service to take care of it. At times, a SMSES owner may get an idea for a product or service and source a market for it. As a small business, there is the need to be constantly engaged. Research, timing, and a little luck transform commonplace ideas into successful businesses. People get ideas from reading various articles and books; small business owners should interact with people and make enquiries on the existing products and services and look for what is lacking in the existing products and services and initiate a means to improve on them. SMSES owners look out for the things that people will like but which are not yet available and provides it for the masses and can also go into packaging and repackaging of the products that are in existence and make them look more attractive. It will also help in the improvement of the quality of already existing products.

SMSES owner can also produce goods that are already in existence for an already existing market. In this case, he must find a way to convince the consumers of the need to patronise him and also face the challenges of competing with already existing marketers or small business owners. This may cause him to reduce the selling price while producing a high-quality product and ensuring that the product is well advertised through various means; all these will make his start-up cost high and the profit will be uncertain. This is one of the reasons why SMSES owner must ensure that there is sufficient start-up capital. With all this information, SMSES owners should be successful and sustained in their business endeavour, seeking for this information will be better accessed through the libraries.

### **THE IMPACT OF INFORMATION TO SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS**

The effective use of information can produce a number of benefits for the small business including reduced administrative costs, more effective collaboration with external parties and increased customer service through greater efficiency. However, many in business remain unconvinced of the utility and value of information in their business practice, despite information theorists arguing that there is a 'need to have access to adequate information to increase and sustain their business competitiveness. One barrier for small businesses is the lack of staff, time and resources to find and manage information. Small business organisations are notorious for their slowness to invest in and adopt, even the most basic uses of information technology, let alone appreciate the strategic impact that effective information systems can have on the success of a business'. Access to information 'provides the enterprises with a competitive edge in running their business a major constraint to developing a dynamic SMSES are the accessibility of validated relevant information (Savarese et al., 2016).

The failure of small business to appreciate the contribution of good information access to the fact that the impact of information access on business success has not been demonstrated convincingly, the 'explanation for the differences in SMSES performance is very complicated in view of the many influences on success. One of the factors that is frequently referred to is the use of adequate information and a sound information system'. Small business owner understanding how information can help them to be successful, SMSES owners who use more information achieve better results and are, interestingly, more optimistic about the future (Marcella & Illingworth, 2012).

SMSES owners value information to arm themselves for the future. Rather than owners' attitudes to information, the present research seeks to explore the more subtle impact that poor information access may have had on actual performance, whether or not the SMSES owners is aware that this is the case. It also seeks to explore links between information behaviour and failure rather than success: the difficulty lies in demonstrating absolutely impact on success, while the current research suggests that impact on failure may conversely allow a more concrete conceptualisation and demonstration of impact (Savarese et al., 2016). Karia et al. (2020) noticed another important issue, which is the impact of information overload on SMSES owners' information behaviour. The authors found that information overload may have a direct but negative impact on SMSES owner's self-efficacy and highlighted its role on the SMSES owners cognitive and information processing ability for business performance.

## IMPLICATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE

There is need to integrate SMSES owners into information society through access to library services. Information society is one in which the creation, distribution and manipulation of information are highly significant in all social and economic activities. Information is widely recognized as one of the social needs of the citizen. Various specialists outside librarianship have identified information as a factor to be used to alleviate poverty. Every business needs to acquire, store and use information to allow it to survive. Library and Information services is very vital to the survival of SMSES and it should be adequately provided for, and this is the ultimate responsibilities of the librarians (Oni et al., 2014).

There are different types of libraries: the National, academic, public, and school, special and private libraries. The type of library that is established depends on the needs of clients to be served. The library is a social institution that is meant to collect, organize, preserve and disseminate information to its patrons. The library is not just a place to go and read books solely to pass examinations, but it is a place where other people's ideas, innovations and creativities are found. The library, having collected and preserved the materials, is meant to serve people to meet their various information needs, and SMSES owner is one of the potential clients to the library be it public, academic or special libraries (Okeke, 2011).

A public library is an organisation or institution offering information services to the general public and is operated by information professionals who are referred to as librarians. Libraries are traditionally known for performing four major functions. They are informative, educational, recreational and cultural. Libraries contribute immensely to the nation's literacy development and lifelong learning. Public libraries serve as the main information resource centres for rural communities and other disadvantaged groups. In 1996, UNESCO's manifesto on public libraries highlighted the expanded mission of public libraries in providing information services adapted to the local business communities. The origin of public libraries' provision of information services to small business owner is based on the Community Information Service (CIS) with examples both Great Britain and the United States in the nineteenth century (Gichohi, 2016).

Maker space is also known and referred to as fablabs and it is a space in the library that is created for collaboration, irrespective of the field of study, where people meet to do creative work in projects, invent new ones and share ideas. Many libraries offer community resources such as 3D printers, software, electronics, craft and hardware. As universities are trying to produce students who will SMSES owners after the-left the university, many academic libraries have begun to provide access to maker resources and services. A maker space will be useful for innovation and collaboration when the students who will become the future SMSES owners are educated and skilled on how to use it. Users need to learn how to use 3D model and design, in order to use 3D printer to design their own creations. Skills on computer programming and hardware development will also be vital to prototype on common maker-space. As a small business owner if you need a prototype of your product, the library will provide it for you through the use of 3D printer. A growing number of libraries have maker-spaces and other workspaces to help you realize your vision (Radniecki & Klenke, 2017).

The library resources or library collections are the information materials that have been acquired, processed and stored for information dissemination. For the library to meet the information needs of the small business owners, the librarian has to know the area of business venture that the small business owner is interested in and collect materials that will help him to improve on the business venture that he has undertaken. These collections will be a specialized book, databases, and reference materials written by experienced entrepreneurs who have written documentations on how and what they did to become successful small business owners. As a small business owner, research should be one of the basic things to be done on daily basis, and due to the busy schedule that the entrepreneur has the librarian becomes the best person to help in the literature search and then package it in such a way that, at a glance, the small business owners will grab the information that is needed for decision-making or for planning or implementation. The libraries also provide access to expensive materials that cost thousands of dollars to purchase and prohibitive research and reference materials for the SMSES owners thus making it possible for the materials to be available to everyone without any cost (Gichohi,2016).

Library instructions are the library programmes and services that are given to the small business owners to keep them informed on what is current in their area of business venture, this includes series of free workshops and seminars covering topics such as the copyright law, information on trademarks, government policies on the business, and intellectual property rights. They also need information on how to register their business venture in the corporate affairs of the nation, with library instruction by the library; entrepreneurs can also know the situation of inflation in the country. So, it is advisable for the entrepreneurs to make proper use of the library to boost their business. Talking about Intellectual Property Resources you have to ensure that before a small business owner commits himself to creating the best product ever, he should be sure that someone has not already created it. For you to know, libraries can provide the resources and know-how to check for patent and trademark information so you do not waste valuable time and resources or get yourself into a sticky legal situation. If you are a business owner, an established business owner, or just thinking about starting a business, head for the library. You will be pleasantly surprised at the role the librarian, with the help of the library resources, can play in helping you start and grow your business. Those roles mentioned are just part of what the library can offer you, so you as a business owner are encouraged to make the library your second office and see how your business will grow (Obiamalu, 2018).

### Challenges Militating against Access to Library Services small business owners.

Oni et al. (2014) aver that information materials have to be repackaging to the format that can be understand by small business owners, and this is a challenge to the librarians since the resources are limited. It is very clear that library-based information services like provision of books and other reading materials, selective dissemination of information, (SDI), current awareness service (CAS), reference/referral and lending services are available to the door step of small business owners. Other challenges are:

- a. Poor network/ bandwidth in library
- b. Lack of information infrastructure such as functional public library, mobile library service, information centres and so on
- c. Lack of information and communication technology tools

### CONCLUSION

Information is an essential ingredient to the growth of any business. It is a well-known fact that information brings about knowledge and knowledge is power. The growth and development of small business depend to a large extent to the amount of library and information services at their disposal. The librarians should make themselves available SMSES owners in order to meeting their information needs. Librarian's work is very vital in the proper functioning of any business. The library is the institution where information materials are acquired and stored for the general public to access. It has also been said that information is knowledge, and when one is not informed, the person will be deformed. So, to remain relevant in the society SMSES owners, need information, and that information is stored in the library. It will, therefore, be vital for everybody, both small business owners and intending ones, to always make use of the library. There are innovations in the library that can help SMSES owners to move to the next success level if only they can make use of the library. They should not forget that the librarian is in the library waiting to meet their information needs. Whatever they need to know about their business journey, the librarians at the local library can help. They either know the answer to your question or they know how to find the answer. Librarians are the superpower of libraries.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should provide adequate information infrastructure such as functional public libraries, mobile library service, and information centres for SMSES owners to easily access information needs.
2. Adequate and permanent solution should be proffer by government to eliminate or reduce the problem poor network and bandwidth so as to create room for libraries to meet the information needs of SMSES owners.
3. Librarians should always create awareness for the SMSES owners that are always busy and may not have time to come and look for one information material or the other.
4. SMSES owners and intending ones, should develop the habit of using the library for their information needs

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